A History of

Morgan-Monroe State Forest

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Gabrielle Reece

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Ronald Morris

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

Morgan-Monroe State Forest was born from a time of economic distress and sudden realization of America's shrinking wooded landscape. The State Forests, not to be confused with the State Parks, were created as a site for responsible and sustainable timber management. Morgan-Monroe's close proximity to Indianapolis and Bloomington has greatly emphasized its focus on recreation and created a vibrant history for this forest. This emphasis on recreation on Morgan-Monroe has caused confusion with this State Forest's primary purpose of sustainable timber production. However, there are many claiming that the harvesting done in Morgan-Monroe's Backcountry Area is irresponsible. All opinions on the dilemma have been included and reveal the deep-seated issues. This is the first history is the first to be written on Morgan-Monroe State Forest and is part of a larger project on Indiana State Forests.

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Overview

Morgan-Monroe State Forest, now the second largest state forest in Indiana at 24,000 acres, was not always a robust area. The area that had once been covered with natural hardwoods was clear cut by settlers and almost completely destroyed by the late 1800s. After the soils had been overworked and financial struggles hit during the Great Depression, these properties were reclaimed by the state and established as the state forests. Yet, even as its first 2,000 acres of Morgan-Monroe were purchased, this particular state forest held a quality that most other state forests did not. Whether it was the centralized location or the presence of some standing trees, Morgan-Monroe held great potential as restored natural area. The site was not merely a forest bandage applied to mistreated soils.

Morgan-Monroe certainly has met the expectations of the first state forester and property manager in becoming a popular recreational area. A person living in the city could take Old State Road 37 and drive thirty-five miles south to enjoy a more rugged experience. This state forest offered activities such as hunting, hiking, camping, picnicking, and even pan for Indiana glacial gold. The forest has also collaborated with Indiana University in Bloomington to aid in scientific research. Certain tracts of land were designated as nature preserves and later an area was selected as the Backcountry Area. Here there were no trails or signs –true wilderness.[1]

Recently, the area has become an area of heated debate. Since an increase in logging has been demanded by Mitch Daniels, the Backcountry Area has been subject to harvesting. In becoming a beloved area for primitive hikers and nature enthusiasts, Morgan-Monroe has also become a place of logging opposition. The Indian Forest Alliance (IFA) has demanded that the

[1] "Wright, Rank in BASS Classic: Third wild areas...," *The Indianapolis Star,* August 2, 1981.

area remain intact. For these advocates, a mature forest is worth more than the lumber produced. Yet, the foresters remain adamant that they are conducting responsible and sustainable practices.[2]

Acquiring and Shaping the Land

Understanding the early settlers' failure to farm the lands in south-central Indiana begins with understanding the topography. Just because Indiana is known for its agriculture, does not mean that the whole state is suited for such. The central part of Indiana is divided between the flat plains found in the upper-central portion and then a sudden transition into hilly landscapes starting in south-central Indiana. The flattened central landscape is due to a glacier that covered this area around 16,000 years ago. Glaciers are thought to move at a rate of one foot per year, shoving and compacting dirt that stands in their way. Once the glaciers melted, sand, clay and rocks tilled southward by the ice were left behind, creating the flattened landscape. In the South, floods from the ice carved out rivers and ridges.[3]

Morgan-Monroe State Forest sits right on the boundary of the southernmost point of the glacial till plain, so this area is the beginning of the regions of hilly ridges. The early settlers cleared out the deciduous forests that naturally covered the areas and attempted to farm the rocky ridges in the early 1800s. The soil was found to be unmanageable and unsuitable for agriculture. Without any vegetation covering the area, the barren fields could have eventually turned into swirling, dusty wastelands. Fortunately, plots of land that are undesirable for crops are workable for hardwood trees.

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[2]The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1930*, by the Legislative Bureau Charles Kettleborough, under direction of Harry G. Leslie, Fort Wayne printing Co., Ft. Wayne, IN, 1930, 499-501.

[3] "A Journey with Nature: How Glaciers Shaped Indiana," The Nature Conservancy, January 2015, accessed February 28, 2015, http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/indiana/journeywithnature/how-glaciers-shaped-indiana.xml.

Morgan-Monroe State Forest covers 24,000 acres of land, making it the second largest state forest in the state of Indiana. In to order become the second largest state forest, this area was gradually accumulated over time. In 1829, Indiana passed the Forest Reservation Law and formed the State Board of Forestry in 1901. This act was made in virtue of reforesting barren and eroded soils that were abandoned by the earlier settlers.[4] The first state forest, Clark County, was founded in 1903 and twenty-six years later Morgan-Monroe State forest was established

According to the reports of the State Forester of the time, Ralph Wilcox, acquisition of these lands made for more consistent management of the properties. In his yearly report of the state forests in 1932 he stated, "One person may devote a lifetime of watchful study and work to the development of a tract of timber. The following generation may exploit and destroy in a few weeks with a sawmill all that it took a life-time to build."[5] Indeed, many of these areas had experienced change in ownership. The 1,730 acre tract that was purchased in 1930, that eventually became Scout Ridge Nature Preserve, had a very inconsistent history of ownership. This plot had belonged to Joseph K. Sharpe, who owned a wholesale leather business in Indianapolis, bought the land in one tract. Sharpe was pressured to sell his land due to bankruptcy. After Sharpe lost the land, the property changed ownership sixteen times between 1894 and 1898.[6]

Lands of unstable ownership were often acquired from owners who were willing to be rid of the properties due to their lack of agricultural value. Other landowners were pressured to sell their land due to financial struggles in a time of economic collapse. The value of the property largely depended on its accessibility. According to the report by Ralph Wilcox, the payment for

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[4] John Ullman, "The Greatest Fire Danger Occurs During Spring," *Outdoor Indiana*, May 1968, 30-31.
[5] The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1932*, by legislative bureau Charles Kettleorough, under the direction of Harry G. Leslie, WM. B. Burford Printing Company, Indianapolis, IN, 1933, 328-360.
[6] William B. Barnes, "Scout Ridge Nature Preserve," *Outdoor Indiana,* February 1970, 16-18.

land was categorized as either interior tracts or tracts along State Highway No. 37. The interior tracts were priced at an average $10.14 per acre. This price was a steep drop from the average payment of $33.98 per acre for plot along the highway.[7]

Other properties were acquired from individuals that failed to pay their taxes. The forestry division's attainment of these lands was approved by the State Auditor and State Board, along with the consent of the Attorney General. If the land owner failed to pay their taxes, the division could purchase the title by paying off the delinquent expenses. Clearly, this was the least expensive means by which tracts of lands were purchased, but there were limitations to acquisition of these tax delinquent properties. The title could not be transferred if the owner was residing on the property or if they showed intention of redeeming the tax titles. After all, these were harsh economic times, and the state was not intending to strip residents of their properties. That being said, many titles were never redeemed.[8]

Until money and time were spent on these mismanaged areas, many properties were virtually inaccessible. Due to Morgan-Monroe's close proximity to the state capitol and centrally populated areas, it received a greater proportion of funds for improvements. Improving accessibility to the forest was one of the major critical areas of business.[9] Before the lands were abandoned, they were covered in township roads that cut into the interior areas of the forests. Over time, the lack of maintenance led to great deterioration of the roads the roads and the forest became impenetrable. Creation of roads meant quicker access in case of forest fires and later, a more welcoming area to the public. In 1929, the United States experienced crippling economic collapse. One out of every four Americans was unemployed and another third was reduced to part-time work and smaller paychecks. In the fall of 1931, a work program was created to

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[7]The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1932*, 332-333
[8] Ibid, 331.
[9] Ibid, 336-337.

provide relief to the unemployed. Local farmers heaved in native gravel and created three miles of roads that lay between the fire tower and the road connected to the highway.[10]

Most of the shelter houses, cabins, and barns of the area were constructed out of the local timber. Ralph Wilcox stressed the importance of using the local hardwood, not only out of cost-effectiveness of using the standing timber, but to prove its worth to improve sales. This was challenging because most of the remaining hardwoods of the land were considered low grade materials. Regardless of quality, hardwood lumber was believed to be much more temperamental because it ran the risk of warping and checking (splitting). Carpenters also disliked hardwood because it was more arduous to drive nails into the material.[11]

Even though Morgan-Monroe was a receiving a large quantity of funding, it was still far from being the beautiful urban escape that it was dreamt of being, despite the progress made during the made work project. These areas needed a quicker fix, so why not bring in a whole army of people to improve the area? Oddly enough, that is exactly what happened.

CCC

The area experienced dramatic improvement due to its timing of establishment during the Great Depression and the resultant birth of the Civilian Conservation Corp. (CCC).Within his first one hundred days of presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt he established the New Deal program to provide relief to the unemployed. One of these programs was the CCC established to regenerate forested and natural areas as well as providing work for young men. This not only ensured a sustainable production of timber, but planting trees sooner meant salvaging the value of the land. As the soil lays exposed, the nutrients were slowly being leeched away. The wind

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[10] The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1932*, by legislative bureau Charles Kettleorough, under the direction of Harry G. Leslie, WM. B. Burford Printing Company, Indianapolis, IN, 1933, 332-333.
[11] Ibid, 337.

would blow away the topsoil and the rain would compact the earth, but not before washing away nutrients and organic matter.

By 1933, two out of the first three CCC camps, Companies 515 and 516, were established in Morgan-Monroe near Martinsville, IN. The men were first sent to a conditioning center at Fort Knox, Kentucky before they were sent to Martinsville. Many young men rallied to become part of the Tree Army.[12]

They were required to be in the age range of 18-25, unmarried, and physically fit for duty. The men were responsible for building their own barracks (using lumber from the forest), planting trees, digging out areas for lakes, and suppressing fires. They were paid $30 per month and were required to send $25 of their earnings to their families. There was the obvious appeal of having their basic needs being covered, but there was also the excitement of escaping the urban areas.[13]

Two men from Fort Wayne, Carl Bredemeyer and Francis Wellman, were part of the 270,000 men that had enrolled by June 29, 1933. They were sent to CCC Camp 516 in Morgan-Monroe State Forest. Wellman, then an 18 years old and freshly graduated from North Side High School, learned to cut down deadened and diseased trees. Carl Bredemeyer, then a 19 year old, was a cook. Wellman recounted his years of participation. Wellman summed up years spent in the CCC camps stating, "Everybody got along. We learned to work."[14]After one year, Camp 516 was sent to Mammoth Cave National Park.[15]

Initially there was some concern over who would be recruited into the camp and for what intentions. It was suggested that the camp would have politically appointed overseers and men

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[12]Faith J. Van Gilder, "CCC Worker's Legacy Seen in Nation's Parks," *The News Sentinel*, 2000, accessed February 8, 2015, http://egen.fortwayne.com/ns/projects/history/2000/1930/bank6.php.
[13]Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

with technical skills. As the camp began to attract increasing numbers of able-bodied young men, the concerns rose of conversion of the company into auxiliary reserves for the military. Many pacifists, suspicious from the previous war, observed the camps with heavy scrutiny. The camps went through great pains to prove that they were trying to teach the boys tools of trade that could be used for civilian work.[16]

Camp 515 in Martinsville produced a monthly pamphlet *Flying Chips* that reported the monthly news of the camp. On the covers of most monthly pamphlets read the words, "Hew to the line, and let the chips fall where they may."[17] This expression refers to the hewing on the markings of trees with a broad-ax. These publications initially embraced the idea of the CCC camp being part of a Tree Army and used terminology that smacked of a military regime. At the beginning of each publication there were reports new enlisted men, results of inspections, and even discharges—honorable or dishonorable. Some of the men discharged were deserters, some were transferred to other camps, and others had successfully found employment elsewhere. There were also warnings against gambling and private ownership of automobiles. Anyone caught violating these War Department regulations were subject to immediate, dishonorable discharge.[18] The news, for the most part, praised the progress of the Camp 515, proudly listing headway made at the sandstone quarry, when tree seedlings were gathered, and even the addition of a Frigidaire to the company kitchen in 1938.[19]

These camps were not only created to have sources of manual labor. They were equally invested in cultivating the company of young men as they were the landscape. They urged the men to pursue education and provided sources of entertainment. One of the earlier issues of

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[16]"Better Men, Better Land," Flying Chips, May 31, 1933.
[17] Source from *Flying Chips* newsletters, 1933-1938.
[18] "War Department Regulations," *Flying Chips,* January 31, 1938.
[19]Ibid.

Flying Chips claimed, "Young men, 'green, underfed, and untrained', are rescued from street corner and idleness and placed in camps where they get the benefits of discipline, good food, medical care, and vocational and liberal courses in education."[20] The men were free to pursue courses in forestry, auto mechanics, surveying, art weaving, photography and even taxidermy. Other boys were aided in completing high school educations. It was noted in the pamphlets that two of the members were illiterate, but showed enough improvement in three months to write letters to their families.[21]

One of the darkest times of camp 515 started before Christmastime in 1937. The camp was quarantined due to a suspected outbreak of scarlet fever. One enrollee was suspected to suffer from the illness was later confirmed to have measles, of which several of the men were ailing. Later two men were confirmed to have contracted scarlet fever and were sent to the hospital while the camp remained under a working quarantine. Not surprisingly, there were an unusually high number of discharges during this time.[22]

Even with a schedule filled with work in the forest and classes, there was still a lot of time devoted to leisure. The officers and boys of the camp alike were often sighted at the baseball diamonds, bowling, or on the tennis courts. Often the company would hold tournaments in which both the officers and young men could participate. It was noted that the young men of the company usually thumped their superiors.[23]At the end of every month there was a company dance held. It was never noted whether there was any significant female presence, just a short paragraph reporting that the event had occurred that the men had a "fine time."[24]

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[20] "Better Men, Better Land," *Flying Chips*, May 31, 1933.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "Scarlett Fever," *Flying Chips,* January 31, 1938.
[23] Company News, *Flying Chips,* October 31, 1935.
[24] Source from *Flying Chips* newsletters, 1933-1938.

The CCC stands as a bright period in American history. The efforts of the camps yielded drastic improvements, but perhaps even more importantly, provided young men with new skills sets, newfound purpose, and income for their families. The camps were disbanded once the United States entered World War II. Peacetime work was finished. Men, fondly looked back at the times spent working in the camps. For many, they were the greatest years of their lives.

Fire Suppression Era

Much of the history of Moran-Monroe State Forest is intertwined with the history and attitudes towards fire suppression. Around the period in the early 1900s when reforestation was recognized as an important movement, so followed the rise in public concern for forest fires. Serious efforts towards fire suppression began in the same year Morgan-Monroe State Forest was established. Later, it developed into the Fire Control Headquarters for coordination of fire suppression.[25]

In 1905, the first fire laws were passed in Indiana and were met with a lot of positive reactions. This law stated that a person could be faced with a fine ranging from $5-50.00 or even imprisonment if they, intentionally or unintentionally, set a fire to woods not under their ownership. Additionally, they were required to pay for damages caused to the other person's property. The laws also appointed a Township Road Supervisor that would hire additional workers to help suppress fires for a salary of $1.50 per day. However, the budget for these hired workers came from the existing road budget so virtually no fire suppression was accomplished.[26]

Fire suppression became a more pertinent matter the year the Morgan-Monroe State Forest was purchased. The Indiana Senate defeated the fire bill in 1930, but quickly rescinded this decision the following year when State Forester Wilcox took a member of the general

[25]Lonnie Kern, "IDNR- Division of Forestry, Fire Control," USDA Forest Service, February 2, 2011, accessed February 15, 2015, http://indianawildfire.com/word_documents/in_fire_law.htm.
[26]Ibid.

assembly for a flight to view Indiana forests. From the aerial view, they spotted five different fires.[27]

Because Morgan-Monroe was included in the high fire hazard counties, it was given a great deal of attention for fire suppression. This work was originally done by state crews and local landowners. Once the CCC camps were established, however, the areas were protected by the vigilant and numerous young men living in the area. In 1934, it was deemed necessary to erect a taller fire tower to keep watch over the wooded landscape as the leaves began to dry. The county conservation officers would decide whether the fire tower required a lookout based on the seasons—green, curing, and dead. When the season was considered to be green, there was low risk.[28]

The one hundred foot tower was mainly tiers of iron cross bars, scaffolding and a cab placed at the top where alone lookout would sit, peering out into the distance for rising clouds of smoke. It was not uncommon to have twenty smoke spottings in one day, but early detection made all the difference. Once fire was set in an area, it did not take long for it to spread across the drying timber. When the lookout spotted smoke they would pinpoint its location on an Osborn fire map. This map consisted of contour lines with the fire tower located in the center. The lookout would then radio the Conservation Officer who would usually investigate the cause of the smoke himself and use an object named the "rubber slapper."[29] This object was never officially named, but the unofficial term adequately sums up its structure and function. For more formidable blazes, the conservation officer could call upon the volunteer fire squad.[30]

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[27] Lonnie Kern, "IDNR- Division of Forestry, Fire Control," USDA Forest Service, February 2, 2011, accessed February 15, 2015, http://indianawildfire.com/word_documents/in_fire_law.htm.
[28] Bob Hauton, "Where There's Smoke— There's a Fire," Outdoor Indiana, January 1960, 25-26.
[29] Ibid, 27.
[30] Ibid.

Usually the source of the smoke was due to campers not notifying the watchmen of their intention to start a campfire, cigarettes, or even a bottle lying in direct sunlight. Starting mid-day on November 2, 1987, over one thousand acres between Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forest were destroyed by one of the largest fires on record. The flames reached thirty feet into the air, aided by the scaffolding of crispy foliage and parched underbrush. Fire fighters spent twelve hours battling the blaze and had fifty men remained in the forest until evening of the following day to fight smaller fires that rekindled. Due to the fire having three different points of origin, the fire was suspected to be the result of arson.[31]

Even though these efforts in suppressing fires were well-intentioned, they were ultimately not in the best interest of forest. The practice of fire suppression caused a gradual change in the species composition. When the Native American tribes inhabited the area they would purposefully set fires to clear away the underbrush. This made it less cumbersome trek across the forest without worrying about getting stuck in common greenbrier or lifting their feet over bothersome saplings. Once the fire cleared the underbrush, delicate herbaceous plants would then grow in place as feed for the deer, allowing for the Native Americans to have an abundance of game.[32]

When the pioneers arrived, they also cleared away underbrush by fencing in livestock and allowing them to trample the area as they feasted on nuts. Eventually the forests were cleared, and the oaks and hickories were cleared away, normally this disturbance would serve in these types of trees' best interests. However, the regular disturbances were vilified and so began the domination of the secondary and shade-tolerant forests. Many remember Smoky the Bear urging people to prevent forest fires. In the Western United States, allowing the underbrush and saplings

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[31] "Forest Fire Ruins 1,000 Acres— Arson Possible at Southern Indiana Site," *Indianapolis Star,* November 4, 1987.
[32] David LeBlanc, professor of forestry, interview by author, March 17, 2015.

to grow essentially was creating a buildup of fuel on the forest floor. When the eventual dry season came, the forest would burst into massive crown fires sending waves of heat and destruction. Here in Indiana, the land is far too wet to create these huge crown fires that still plague the west, but there are consequences.[33]

The state used to possess an abundance of oaks, a valuable timber species. In the second decade of the twenty first century, there seems to be a transition from these valuable oaks to maples. The maple does not produce the same quality of wood, or the coveted acorns that oaks provide to wildlife.[34] When a fire occurs, these saplings are quickly wiped out, leaving the mature oaks intact. When the fire towers were installed, an alarm was sounded every time someone spotted smoke. Although these efforts were noble, they were not in the best interest of the fire-resistant oak species. When the oaks were harvested, the maple saplings then grew in their place.[35]

Recreational Value

When Morgan-Monroe State Forest was established in 1929, the attitude towards recreation was that it could occur as long as it did not interfere with the forestry practices. However, Ralph Wilcox predicted the change in priorities for the state forests claiming, "Although purchased primarily for growing a crop of timber, their secondary value now for recreational purposes may become their primary purpose."[36] In fact, state forests were suspected to bring in crowds similar to the state parks. As the seedling grew into fuller, more mature

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Scott Haulton, "Will Restricting Harvesting from State Forest 'Backcountry Areas" Benefit Our Species of Greatest Conservation Concern, " IDNR Division of Forestry, September 2009, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-BackcountyWildlifeHabitat.pdfDavid LeBlanc, professor of forestry, interview by author, March 17, 2015.
[36] The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1930*, by the Legislative Bureau Charles Kettleborough, under direction of Harry G. Leslie, Fort Wayne printing Co., Ft. Wayne, IN, 1930, 512.

forests, it would only be a matter of time before the state residents could no longer resist the stunning foliage.

Hiking trails were a major part of the recreational value. Two of the major trails, Tulip Tree Trace and Yellowwood, were major areas of foot traffic when Morgan-Monroe first started receiving public interest after World War II. Yellowwood trail bordered Morgan-Monroe and Yellowwood State Forest. In the height of its popularity, one would see hikers begin the trail at 4 am to hike the entire length of the trail. Tulip Tree Trace was used by the Boy Scouts and was so designated as "their" trail.[37] Tulip Tree Trace was a trail was developed in 1958 based on the old Native American and pioneer stagecoach trails. The twenty-two mile trail, running between Yellowwood and Morgan-Monroe State Forest, largely cut through dense forests indicated by white diamond signs with a red tulip leaf in the corner.[38] This trail was used so scouts could receive the 20-miler merit badge. Attaining this badge meant that the scout hiked the span of 20 miles in a single day while with the necessary provisions.[39]

Toward the mid 1950s, the idea of converting this state forest into a state park became a popular notion. By the summer of 1954, many businesses in Martinsville organized groups to backing this conversion and quickly fulfilling the prophecy of Ralph Wilcox that the forests would not long be remembered as a site for the steady production of timber.[40] The South Martinsville Business Association voted in support of it becoming a state park with the president of the association, Albert Allen, claiming, "[This Forest] would be used a lot more if it were a

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[37]"Morgan-Monroe State Forest," *Outdoor Indiana*, February 1959, 16.
[38] W. L Thrompson,"See Indiana First," *Outdoor Indiana*, September 1959, 19-20.
[39]"Yellowwood State Forest," *Outdoor Indiana*, June 1959, 2.
[40] The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1932*, 357.

park."[41] They also made claims that the current state parks were overcrowded and that adding Morgan-Monroe to the list would relieve this overcrowding.[42]

Allen also made the financial aspect of conversion more tempting. When asked about the costs of changing Morgan-Monroe to a state park, the president claimed that not only would the costs be negligible, but they might actually turn a profit for the state. If Morgan-Monroe had been successfully converted, it would have been the second largest state park. Not only would it have been large, but Allen also claimed that it held the potential of being the nicest state park. Morgan-Monroe desperately needed more cabins, hotels, boats and other recreational facilities.[43]

The proposition that Morgan-Monroe be converted to a state park was declined, but by the 1960s, the state residents had becomes fully aware of Morgan-Monroe's transition from bare abandoned land into a handsome reforested area. Thanks to the earlier work of the CCC, the beautification of the land was expedited so the forested area was quickly covered with trees, lakes were dug, and shelter and picnic areas were built, but this state forest did not receive many visitors until it received further developments in 1958. Some of the interior tracts that were virtually inaccessible to most people were connected to the outside world via the addition of asphalt and gravel roads. Morgan-Monroe was situated as the perfect getaway spot for those residents who dwelled in the state capitol and Bloomington.[44]

The 21,435 acres had transitioned from a spot of forestry experimentation and a means to control erosion and watershed to a public source of enjoyment. However, there were certain liberties that could be enjoyed in the state forest that could not be enjoyed in the state parks. The freedom being that there was no charge for admission. Hunters were encouraged to pursue the

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[41]"South Martinsville Group Backs New State Park,"*Martinsville Daily Reporter*, July 7, 1954.
[42]Ibid.
[43] "South Martinsville Group Backs New State Park."
[44]"Morgan-Monroe State Forest," Outdoor Indiana, February 1959, 16.

deer that roamed the forests and the stocked lakes begged for fishermen to cast their lines. There were also no leash laws in most of the forested areas so people were free to hike with their faithful canine companions.[45]

Gold panning was one of the more interesting hobbies that could be enjoyed in Morgan-Monroe, thanks to the glaciers thousands of years ago. Much of southern Indiana had deposits of glacial gold occurring in fine specks that are around one-sixteen inch diameter. If a visitor panned in pursuit of riches, they were sorely disappointed. The highest valued nuggets that had ever been found were appraised at six dollars. The most valuable items discovered were the numerous but small diamonds when gravel was being washed in Morgan and Brown County. Yet, many Hoosiers still happily apply for free permits. Many are aware that their labors will not come to fruition, but still delight in this unusual hobby.[46]

Despite the area being denied the title as a state park, it had received a lot of funding for facilities and a boost in recreational activity. On August 21, 1969, Scout Ridge Nature Preserve was the second preserve to be dedicated in the state-wide system. No cutting of timber had been done since it was purchased by the Division of Forestry and Department of Natural Resources, and since it had been designated as a preserve, it never will be. The trees grow until the point of senescence and fallen logs are left for decomposition.[47]

This area contains beautiful natural land forms and plant species. Impressive native flowers like wild ginger and Jack-in-the-pulpit can be spotted in Scout Ridge. Jack-in-the-pulpit is a curious flower that was named for its leaf-like structure called the spadix (the pulpit) that wraps around the fluorescence (Jack). By late summer, this flower produces a striking bright red

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[45] Betty Bennet, "Our State Forests: Reservoirs of Recreation," *Hoosier Motorist,* September-October 1964, 11.
[46]Duncan J. McGregor and R. Dee Rarick, "In Indiana Gold is Where You Find It," *Outdoor Indiana*, April 1962, 30.
[47] William B. Barnes, "Scout Ridge Nature Preserve," *Outdoor Indiana*, February 1970, 18.

berry. It is important to note that these luscious, red berries contains calcium oxidate crystals that can cause severe swelling to the mouth and digestive system, so these plants should be left to be admired and not ingested. The streambeds have exposed bedrock that reveals fossil sea-lilies and glacial boulders. Further down the trail is a 42-inch diameter American beech tree, making it the largest tree specimen in the preserve. The bark of these trees is smooth and easily scarred, making them perfect targets for lovers who want to carve their initials. Although a common practice, this exposes the tree to fungal infections.[48]

In 1981, Morgan Monroe's far eastern plots were granted the title of the Backcountry Area. James M. Ridenour, the director of DNR at the time, addressed the meaning of this designation saying, "The state designation of the 'Backcountry' is similar to the federal Wilderness Area designation, but we think our program more nearly fits the needs of Hoosiers...This [designation] puts emphasis on primitive hiking experiences."[49] More primitive hiking meant there was to be as little disturbance to the area as possible by visitors. Groups were limited to six people and no camp sites were allowed a quarter mile past the area's access point. All the trails were unmarked and the area was relatively free of roads. Despite all the restriction put on the visitors, there were few restrictions for the Division of Forestry. This seemingly small detail leads to much heated debate over timber harvesting in the future.[50]

Ghost Stories

It is not precisely known when such tales begin to be put into circulation, but there are a few eerie stories related to Steppe Cemetery, located almost in the center of Morgan-Monroe. The cemetery has been around for since the early 19th century and many of the gravestones are so worn that names and dates are indecipherable. The site contains no more than twenty-five

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[48]Ibid.
[49] NA, "Wright, Rank in BASS Classic: Third wild areas..," *The Indianapolis Star,* August 2, 1981.
[50]Ibid.

headstones for no one has been buried there for a long time. On the Southern boundary of the graveyard there is a tombstone that, like many others, has names and dates worn past the point of marking this person's identity. However, the length of this grave reaches only three feet in length, which leads a visitor to the saddening realization that birth dates and death dates were not too distant.[51]

Beside the grave of the baby is a stump, but the form of this particular stump has been likened to the shape of a chair. As many accounts of the story go, it is here where the apparition of the woman in black sits, sobbing and rocking her arms as if she were soothing a baby. The tales usually report that the woman has long white hair, old, not ugly, dressed all in black with triangular mark on her forehead. Although eerie, the story may drum up a lot of sympathy for the weeping lady if not for one fact—the curse of the stump. It has been said that the lady is very protective of her child's grave. If anyone sits upon her throne, they will die a year later to the day. Due to this curse, it has become sort of a dare for people, mainly teenagers, to visit the site at night and if they are bold enough, sit upon the stump.[52]

There have also been many variations of the story. Some of the more popular versions were compiled by folklorists of Indiana University. In some versions, the lady in black is crying for her husband and child that were killed in an automobile accident. Other versions are different variations of a girl being murdered by her boyfriend. The mother now checks the cars of the young couples visiting the cemetery, searching the vehicles for the body of her daughter. This last story seems closer to other urban legends developed to scare teenagers, almost approaching similarity to the old story of The Hook. Most people have heard this story, regardless of their locations. To those unfamiliar with this tale, there is usually an escaped convict that has a hook

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[51] James A. Willis, *Haunted Indiana: Ghosts and Strange Phenomena of the Hoosier State*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2012), 39-40.

[52] Willis, *Haunted Indiana: Ghosts and Strange Phenomena of the Hoosier State*, 39-40.

for a hand, preying upon two young lovers in a parked car. The lovers will hear a report of the hooked-handed man's escape in their area. The lovers will flee and later find the hook embedded in their car door, wrenched from the arm of convict as he was ready to pry open the door. In Stepp Cemetery's version, the frightening figure is not a convict but a woman who had her hand smashed in an automobile accident. The very automobile accident killed her son so she now lurks in the cemetery, shaking her hook at people disturbing her lamentations. Never have there been reports of her attacking anyone, though.[53]

If these stories were made to frighten teens, then they have certainly done their job. Although there are few written accounts, there is one given by a teenage girl who had visited the cemetery with two of her friends. The girl admitted that she was reluctant to go, but gave into the pressure of her friends. They experienced no more than a brief, uneventful stroll around the cemetery before admitting defeat and heading back to their car. As they were rounding the curve that lead to the exit at the highway, they heard the sound of intensely rushing wind. In the middle of the road, there was a rippling image. The car lights then shut off and the motor died. The girl tried to start the car, but failed as the image drew closer. The image then drifted across the road, and the car resumed all functions without anyone touching the ignition. The girls claimed that they never visited Stepp Cemetery again.[54]

Aside from all of the stories surrounding the lady in black, there are also many speculations of the origins of the cemetery. Visitors will be assured by forest rangers that the cemetery was begun by families in the area, but there have been speculations that the area has connections to a cult known as the Crabbites. This religious cult conducted services that consisted of the members handling snakes and performing sexual rites. One resident claimed that

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Michael Norman and Beth Scott, *Haunted America*, (New York, NY: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, 1994), 93.

her father had been informed of an ongoing sexual ceremony and arrived at the cemetery to break it up with the use of a bull whip.[55]

From the black lady to the mysterious Crabbites, the cemetery remains a tangled mess of tales. Stories began to spiral out of control and mesh together with familiar urban legends. One of the offsets from the stories was that a gravestone marked as "Baby Lester 1937" was the marker for the child of the Lady in Black. Later, the child's mother, Olethia Walls, was found alive and no, she had not spent her time stalking teenagers in a graveyard. Despite the debunking, people still leave trinkets for Baby Lester on his headstone. Whether a person believes in such myths does not mean that the cemetery is not arguably eerie and due to the stories, the site has experience a decent amount of traffic.[56] Unfortunately, many of the gravestones have been defaced in the process, and the stump has rotted past the point of resembling a cursed throne. Yet, the legend lives on, hijacking the imaginations of the visitors.

Scientific Research

Morgan-Monroe's location proves advantageous again, but not only for the purposes of invigorating city dwellers. This state forest lies only fifteen miles northeast of Indiana University in Bloomington. Researchers from IU have taken advantage of the 24,000 acres of forest for a different areas of scientific exploration. Two sites, the Morgan-Monroe Observatory and the AmeriFLUX/FLUXnet tower were built within the forest.[57] In the mid-1960s, a 16-inch Cassegrain telescope was installed that measured the star's electromagnetic radiation. The Indiana University's Goethe Observatory suffered from the city lights drowning out starlight,

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[55]Ibid, 94.
[56] Ibid, 94-95.
[57] Morgan-Monroe Observatory," Indiana University Department of Astronomy, November 26, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.astro.indiana.edu/morgan_monroe.shtml; "IU's Data-Gathering Tower in Morgan-Monroes State Forest Earns Future Funding," *IU Bloomington Newsroom*, September 23, 2013, accessed March 14, 2015, http://news.indiana.edu/releases/iu/university-wide/2013/09/flux-tower.shtml.

making it harder to study stellar arrangements. Fortunately, Morgan-Monroe had thousands of acres of dense foliage that provided a barrier from non-natural lighting. In 1989 the telescope was updated into an unattended system known as Roboscope.[58]

Since 1998, Indiana University has managed the Ameriflux/FLUXnet tower that can measure the areas that measures comparative humidity and weather. In the time of growing concern over climate change, though, the towers most valuable contribution is in furthering understanding of the carbon dioxide exchange between forest ecosystems and the atmosphere. It is one of the longest running tower sites of the 1,000 sites supported through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of Energy's Terrestrial Ecosystem Science program, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the National Science Foundation.[59]

By measuring the carbon dioxide, researchers have made many startling discoveries. One of the observations showed that warmer temperatures from 2000 to 2012 have led to longer growing seasons. If the trees retain their green leaves from longer periods, it would seem to follow that carbon dioxide uptake would increase, which was true until 2008. As the temperatures climbed, the forest has become drier. As the forest dries, trees halt their growth earlier in the growing season. When trees halt their growing season they reduce their carbon dioxide uptake which also results in less wood production. A drought occurred in 2012 that was unique in that it arrived earlier and with more severity than the usual droughts experienced in this

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[58] "Morgan-Monroe Observatory," Indiana University Department of Astronomy, November 26, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.astro.indiana.edu/morgan_monroe.shtml.

[59] "IU's Data-Gathering Tower in Morgan-Monroes State Forest Earns Future Funding," *IU Bloomington Newsroom*, September 23, 2013, accessed March 14, 2015, http://news.indiana.edu/releases/iu/university-wide/2013/09/flux-tower.shtml.

region. This year produced the longest growing season by about twenty days, but it showed the third lowest carbon uptake on record.[60]

Timber Harvesting

Prior to the establishments of the state forests, the timber production from the state of Indiana was on a road to rapid decline. By 1930, Indiana was producing one-fifth of the amount it did in 1900. Like most of the states, most of the lumber was being hauled in from the Pacific Northwest. This presented two distinct problems. First, the state was spending money on importing timber from outside sources. Second, those outside sources were being depleted. In order to take the pressure off the Pacific Northwest, timber production would have to be revived. The country had come to a point where the Eastern part of the United States was mainly privately owned so the state cannot demand people start growing timber on their private properties.[61] However, due to the financial struggles of the time, the window of opportunity for government reclamation of the land was wide open.

Designating areas like Morgan-Monroe as state forests seemed like a simple solution to for decreasing timber imports, but even in its earliest times of conception many predicted that there would be some opposition to the harvesting of trees. An area as lovely as Morgan-Monroe creates an even greater resistance to timber harvesting. This forest was unique in that it was widely recognized that it could become a popular area for recreation, even in the earlier times of its establishment. As sustainable forest practices go, just as areas become beautiful and mature, it is time to cut them down. Unsurprisingly, sustainable timber harvesting is hardly a consolation to someone that has found that their favorite hiking trail has been clear cut.

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[60]Ibid.
[61]The State of Indiana, *Year book of the State of Indiana for 1930*, 499-501.

Timber has been steadily collected from Morgan Monroe State Forest since it was established. Ralph Wilcox's dream of people appreciating the appeals of the local hardwoods was realized. Whenever Morgan-Monroe was mentioned in the newspapers, its annual collection of board feet was proudly posted. As the years continued, people grew wearier of timber practices. The logging in Morgan-Monroe was no longer proudly posted. In 2005, Governor Mitch Daniels demanded an increase in timber harvesting. Logging in state areas was to be quadrupled. To keep up with this increased need for timber, Morgan-Monroe's Backcountry Area was asked to step up to the plate. This is where the trouble begins. This increase in timber harvest has drawn much criticism of the Governor, the legislature and the Division of Forestry (DOF) in its attempt to comply with the Governor and legislature's demands.[62]

In an interview with a select group of protestors in 2009 with the *Bloomington Alternative*, an Indiana Forest Alliance (IFA) director was asked whether she was against loggers. The director, Rhonda Baird, replied, "No not at all. In fact, from a permaculture perspective, we need people skilled in forestry who practice responsible logging, and we need them for our local and state economy. The difference in opinion here is how much logging should be done on these public lands."[63] This opinion seems to ring through most people opposing the logging. Everyone understands that timber products must be seized from somewhere, and many people have never made efforts to abstain from using wooden items. If this is understood, why is there distrust of the Division of Forestry?

One the most prominent figures opposing logging in Indiana is Myke Luurstemsa, the coordinator of Hoosier Forest Watch, a project of the IFA. He created this project once the logging began in Morgan-Monroe's Backcountry Area in 2011. The area had gone untouched

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[62] David Stewart, "Daniels State Forest Decimation Continues," *The Bloomington Alternative,* November 29, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, http://www.bloomingtonalternative.com/articles/2009/11/29/10239.
[63] Ibid.

since it was designated in 1981, so logging when operations began, there was a tremendous amount of backlash from residents that enjoyed the natural area and the IFA. He explains the inherent distrust of what responsible logging operations saying, "There's a utilitarian science and a utilitarian approach to forest management. [The Division of Forestry] doesn't view the forest as having any value unless it's being logged."[64] Luurtsema also encourages any person that is concerned about the logging practices to write a letter to the current senator, governor or local forester if they feel if logging at a site has threatened wildlife.[65]

It is understandable why members of the IFA are concerned. Indiana has an overwhelming amount of land devoted to agriculture and limited scenic areas, so many feel protective of what natural areas there are. The backcountry is also one of the few areas in Indiana that could become an old growth area. Old growth forests have more foliage layers that give rise to a wide range of habitat that can serve as a home to many different species. This creates a complex ecosystem that ecologists, even after a lifetime of study, have hardly even scratched the surface. One might see giant oaks towering the dogwoods that decorate the understory. Dead, standing trees serves as homes to woodpeckers while downed logs provide life to fungi. Many of the state forests are fairly new, planted only a little under eighty years ago. This is a small span of time if one considers that it may take at least two hundred years for a forest to reach old growth. Indiana has fewer than 2,000 acres of old growth forest left. Without these old growth forests, the unique species that depend on its structure have no other place to live.[66]

In response to the IFA's harsh criticism of foresters overprizing of timber production, many foresters claim that forestry practice is progressing towards a more holistic view of the

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[64]"Myke Luurtsema:Hoosier Forest Watch," Alycin Bektesh, *Ecoreport*, aired December 19, 2013 on WFHB, accessed January 15, 2015, http://wfhb.org/news/ecoreport-myke-luurtsema-hoosier-forest-watch/.
[65]Ibid.
[66] David LeBlanc, professor of forestry, interviewed by author, March 17, 2015.

forest's worth. John Seifurt from the Division of Forestry has spoken in defense of the foresters at Morgan-Monroe. From an ecological standpoint, he feels that they give proper site evaluation. They do endangered species assessments when they select the trees that are to be sold. Selection cutting is one of the best methods for balancing preservation of the habitat and the aesthetics while still harvesting timber.[67]

The type of harvesting that has been causing much concern among protestors is what the division of forestry refers to as regenerative openings. This means that larger areas of trees are cut down, which makes many people uneasy. However, this type of harvesting might help the forester improve the species composition in the Backcountry Area. One of these species of concern is the oak species, which are of high value for timber and to wildlife since it produces acorns and nesting areas. As mentioned in the previous discussion of fire suppression, oak trees flourish under disturbance. The selection harvesting done in the Backcountry Area does not favor oak species, but secondary growth of beech and maple. By clearing out larger areas, they create an environment where shade-intolerant oaks gain the upper hand. Larger cuts also produce fewer edges. Edges are the areas of forest that meet open areas, which is bad for wildlife since they mean less natural, undisturbed interior. As long as the area is regenerated quickly, clear cuttings should be covered with vegetation quickly to reduce soil loss. With the increased demand for timber, perhaps logging of the Backcountry was necessary in order to lessen the severity of harvesting in other areas in Indiana.[68]

Seifert has also pointed out that the Backcountry is not a nature preserve. When the announcement of this tract was designated as the Backcountry Area, it was described as a place

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[67] "Myke Luurtsema: Hoosier Forest Watch," Alycin Bektesh, *Ecoreport*, aired December 19, 2013 on WFHB, accessed January 15, 2015, http://wfhb.org/news/ecoreport-myke-luurtsema-hoosier-forest-watch/.
[68] Scott Haulton, "Will Restricting Harvesting from State Forest 'Backcountry Areas" Benefit Our Species of Greatest Conservation Concern, " IDNR Division of Forestry, September 2009, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.in.gov/dnr/forestry/files/fo-BackcountyWildlifeHabitat.pdf

that would be set aside, but not specifically safe from logging. It was merely intended to have an area that be, at least momentarily, allowed to grow and develop for a more mature forest. In order to comply with the state's demand of timber, the Backcountry Area was a necessary addition so other state forests did not fall into unsustainable logging practices.[69]

Harvesting of timber produces a truly perplexing dilemma. For many, the forest cannot both be enjoyed and exploited. There will always be a need for timber, but will it always be at the cost of degrading natural areas? The movement in forestry to mimic more natural disturbances will ease the stress on wildlife and folks that enjoy seeing fuller, forested areas. The most troubling aspect that remains is the DOF's forced compliance with the logging amounts set by government officials.

Looking into the Future

Morgan-Monroe is a successfully restored area that has developed much of the rich history and attachment to local residents. It has become an area for scientific research, a home to rare wildlife, and a source of mental and emotional uplift for nature lovers. The uses of this state forest as both an area for sustainable forestry, home to wildlife, and recreation has long been a juggling act that the DNR has kept alive until the recent addition of one more item, a statewide requirement for timber harvest. Now the balancing all of these aspects has become much trickier and decisions that are made rarely make state officials and preservation advocacy groups satisfied.

Forestry is still a fairly new practice, and the pool of knowledge of this practice grows as quickly as the forest itself. The impacts of the first massive clearings, fire suppression, and global warming are only now being realized. Hopefully Morgan-Monroe's history will be

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[69]"Wright, Rank in BASS Classic: Third wild areas...," *The Indianapolis Star*, August 2, 1981.

indefinite, and the dreams of sustainable timber and protection of aesthetics may one day be married. Perhaps the new practices will revitalize the oak and hickory forests that once covered the majority of the state as Morgan-Monroe continues to find its way back to becoming a forest reminiscent of its former glory.

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